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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
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GUN CONTROL--AGAIN

During the fifteen years I have been in public office, not a year has gone by in which I have not authored or co-authored legislation to control the insane distribution of guns.

Unfortunately, I have met with little success. Year-after-year the statistical evidence of the carnage that results from our unfettered gun distribution system is ignored. Over and over again, I receive lengthy letters from well-meaning people who are convinced that there is a Constitutional right for every person to turn his garage into a private fortress.

This year I am again deeply involved in efforts to reduce the levels of violence in the United States.

None of the laws I am seeking are really adequate answers to the problem. The weakness of the bills reflects the awareness my colleagues and I have of the enormous resistance we will encounter. It is my ultimate goal to see the outlawing of all handguns except those used by law enforcement officers or held by bona fide collectors of antique guns.

For now, I hope we can enact a simple gun control measure which would accomplish a number of important things. First, it would outlaw snub-nosed handguns with barrels three inches or less in length. Second, it would mandate prison sentences for criminals who use or carry a gun while committing a federal crime.

One of the most important features of the bill is the creation of a 21-day waiting period. Currently, criminals make a mockery of state laws prohibiting the sale of guns to convicted felons, drug addicts, mentally incompetent people, etc. There is neither time nor an established routine to check the backgrounds of gun buyers.

Finally, as a reluctant concession to the many honest citizens who want to own a firearm for self-protection, our bill does nothing to hinder law-abiding citizens from owning a gun. We mandate neither licensing nor registration.

In a separate bill, I am fighting to eliminate at the earliest possible moment "cop-killer bullets". These armor piercing bullets have absolutely no legitimate purpose. They are not used by hunters or marksmen. Their sole purpose is to negate the value of bullet-proof vests used by law enforcement personnel in particularly dangerous situations.

.....MORE.....MORE.....MORE.....

The bill on armor-piercing ammunition is sweeping in scope. It forbids the manufacturer, importation, or sale of these bullets to any private citizen or organization under any circumstances. A number of states already have similar legislation. I fear their laws will be of minimal consequence unless they are extended to the entire nation.

Gun control is an emotional topic for people on both sides. I do not claim to be dispassionate. I am horrified everytime I see full page ads advertising all sorts of lethal hardware to anyone who can pay the price. Over the years, I have met repeatedly with law enforcement experts. All the evidence I have seen convinces me that ordinary citizens rarely succeed in protecting themselves with a gun. On the contrary, the household gun is more likely to result in an accidental death or the shooting of a neighbor or family member than it is to serve as a weapon against crime.

I simply am unwilling to accept the notion that neither the American people nor their elected officials can stop the upward spiral of violence. A sensible gun control policy will save lives without endangering any Constitutional right.

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